

Members:
Sen. David Ford, Chair
Sen. Johnny Nugent
Sen. Katie Wolf
Sen. Richard Young
Rep. Robert Bischoff
Rep. John Frenz
Rep. William Friend
Rep. Richard Mangus



AGRICULTURAL MATTERS EVALUATION COMMITTEE

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MEETING MINUTES¹

Meeting Date: June 23, 1998
Meeting Time: 10:00 A.M.
Meeting Place: State House, 200 W. Washington St., Room 233
Meeting City: Indianapolis, Indiana
Meeting Number: 1

Members Present: Sen. David Ford, Chair; Rep. Robert Bischoff; Rep. John Frenz; Rep. William Friend; Rep. Richard Mangus; Sen. Johnny Nugent; Sen. Katie Wolf; Sen. Richard Young.

Members Absent: None.

Sen. David Ford, Chair of the Agricultural Matters Evaluation Committee, called the meeting to order at about 10:10 a.m. and introduced the members of the Committee.

Status of Hoosier Farmland Preservation Task Force - Ms. Kathy Altman

Ms. Kathy Altman, Executive Director of the Indiana Commission for Agriculture and Rural Development (ICARD), presented an overview of the progress of the Hoosier Farmland Preservation Task Force. Gov. Frank O'Bannon appointed the 19-member bi-partisan Task Force in August 1997. Sen. Katie Wolf and Sen. Johnny Nugent, members of the Agricultural Matters Evaluation Committee, also serve on the Task Force.

The Task Force has three objectives: (1) Examine historical trends, causes and consequences of the conversion of agricultural land to non-agricultural uses; (2) Identify voluntary methods and incentives for preserving and maintaining land for agricultural production; and (3) Provide recommendations for enhancing the continued vitality of agricultural activity and for protecting constitutional private property rights. The Task Force summarized its work on the first objective in its interim report presented January 1, 1998. Ms. Altman stated that the Task Force is just now finishing work on Objective #2 and will begin work on Objective #3 at its July 7 meeting. The work of the Task Force has been primarily involved in fact-finding and information gathering to this point, but will soon shift to discussion, debate, and

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determination of recommendations. The Task Force has held four public forums throughout the state with in excess of 700 individuals participating.

Ms. Altman stated that nationally the conversion of agricultural land to other uses totals more than one million acres per year, equivalent to the size of the state of Delaware. In Indiana, between 1900 and 1992, about 6 million acres were lost, 1.2 million acres of which were converted to other uses between 1978 and 1992. Ms. Altman stated that Indiana ranks second in the U.S. in percentage of the state's land that is considered prime farmland.

Ms. Altman described the trends that were examined by the Task Force as included in the following: Indiana's agricultural contribution to the economy; farm productivity; rural population growth; new housing starts; urban redevelopment patterns; and residential, commercial, and industrial growth. Causes of the loss of prime farmland were described as: A lack of a state planning agency, the transportation infrastructure, competition for land, demand for rural residential settings, population growth and population movement, government policies, and the economic realities of agriculture. Ms. Altman also described some of the consequences of farmland loss as: The permanence of lost farmland, changes in rural characteristics, the decline in U.S. export potential, development out pacing infrastructure, and that septic systems were inadequate for growth.

The Task Force will present its final report with recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly in January of 1999. Ms. Altman described the specific topics to be studied for the Task Force's final report as: Developmental rights, comprehensive planning, zoning, right-to-farm statutes, growth management programs in other states, urban redevelopment, tax policy, public health and septic issues, government policies, and the economic vitality of agriculture.

Sen. Ford stated that, if there are to be any legislative recommendations made by the Task Force, it would be beneficial if this Committee were provided recommendations before November 1 so that the Committee could deliberate and make recommendations of its own. This would allow bill drafts to be considered and have the additional weight provided by a Committee recommendation. Sen. Ford also noted that farmland preservation should also be considered a national food security issue.

Rep. Frenz stated that the extension of I-69 could affect the loss of agricultural land in two ways: (1) direct loss of land to the highway, and (2) indirect loss of land resulting from any increased commercial development resulting from the highway.

Rep. Mangus raised the issue of wetlands and the effect of government policies and programs on the conversion of prime agricultural land into wetlands. Ms. Altman stated that the Task Force has received public comments on this issue and the resulting impact on a community's tax base and that the Task Force will be studying and debating this issue over the next few months.

Sen. Wolf and Sen. Nugent, as members of the Task Force, commented on the dedication of the membership and that the entire Task Force represents a good cross-section of Hoosiers who are dedicated to the common goal of preserving farmland before it becomes a crisis. They stated that the experience has been very informative.

Sen. Ford suggested that the state probably doesn't do as good a job of training, educating, and assisting local zoning board members. There are about 17 counties without zoning ordinances.

Based on support by the Committee, Ms. Altman stated that the Commissioner of Agriculture's Office would host a round table meeting of legislators from Indiana and neighboring states who serve on agriculture committees to discuss common issues and problems. This would be held September 29 in conjunction with the Farm Progress Show being held near Windfall, IN, beginning September 30.

Public Testimony -

Mr. Bob Kraft, Indiana Farm Bureau -

Mr. Bob Kraft, Indiana Farm Bureau, suggested the following potential issues for the Committee to study during the interim.

(1) With respect to the recently passed Grain Indemnity Fund and the Grain Buyers Law, Mr. Kraft stated that there were some minor glitches that needed to be resolved, such as whether seed should be considered as grain for the purposes of this law, and whether the lien law has worked as smoothly as had been hoped.

(2) The relationship between urban and rural communities in Indiana. Mr. Kraft stated that too frequently problems (such as annexation and zoning) are hurriedly examined during the legislative session and studied by legislative committees not directly involved in agriculture. This Committee could examine these issues from the perspective of agriculture.

(3) The confined feeding issue could be studied. Mr. Kraft stated that groups are now wrestling with the Indiana Department of Environmental Management over implementation rules. The Indiana Farm Bureau believes that the intent of the law is being misinterpreted by administrative agencies in their rule-making capacity. The Farm Bureau would like to see certain concerns addressed short of litigation.

Ms. Kaye Whitehead, Indiana Pork Producers -

Ms. Kaye Whitehead, President of the Indiana Pork Producers Association, stated that she would like to echo the comments of the Indiana Farm Bureau, especially with respect to confined feeding. She stated that there needs to be a clarification of authority with respect to rule-making, as well as to what the real intent of the law is. Ms. Whitehead stated that overly prescriptive administrative rules can lock animal agriculture into today's technology. Ms. Whitehead stated that she would present the Committee with written comments in the near future.

Mr. Mauri Williamson -

Mr. Mauri Williamson suggested that property tax reform could be an important issue for the Committee to address during the interim.

Mr. Jeff Thompson, President, State Fair Board -

Mr. Jeff Thompson, President of the State Fair Board, described changes to the State Fair Grounds and invited the Committee to hold one of their meetings at the Fair Grounds.

The Committee tentatively scheduled future meetings of the Committee for July 28 and August 18. Notice will be provided as to time and location.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at about 11:25 a.m..